

## ABSTRACT

A neutral tandem telecommunications network providing public and private wireline and wireless carrier networks connectivity amongst themselves ("transit traffic") and between themselves and metropolitan local exchange carrier ("LEC") central offices ("terminating traffic") as a substitute for utilizing the LEC public switched telephone network ("PSTN") tandems. Telecommunications switching equipment for a Neutral Tandem Network ("NTN") is located at various points in a metropolitan area and used to provide switching connectivity services for traffic passing (i) between carrier networks connected at any point to the NTN as well as (ii) between the carrier networks and the metropolitan LEC central offices and (iii) between the carrier networks and advanced traffic routing services. The services are provided using a metropolitan switch or a soft switch as a higher level in the switching hierarchy above the current RBOC tandems, where the switch has hardwired connections (i) between metropolitan carrier networks and the NTN and (ii) between the NTN and LEC central offices and tandems.

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